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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

E011652: GDS

TAGS : PINS, PORS, ASEC, SHUM, GT

DEPT PASS: MANAGUA, SAN JOSE, SAN SALVADOR, TEGUCIGALPA, USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

FROM : AmEmbassy GUATEMALA

DATE: August 24, 1978

SUBJECT: Monthly Report on Violence and Human Rights: June 1978

REF

3M/VO/000VJ

10 6 NY 82 90V 816

31VIS 40 INCH/000VJ

SUMMARY. In June 44 persons died and 9 were wounded in some 30-odd incidents with political overtones. A single incident involving a land mine explosion accounted for 19 Mobile Military Police (PMA) killed and 6 wounded. The murder of the 19 PMAs was planned and executed by the dissident wing of the PGT (Guatemalan Communist Party). Two other notable killings were that of the head of Army G-1 by the leftwing terrorist Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), and of a rural parish priest who frequently took anti-establishment stands. Otherwise, identifiable sources of violence were exceedingly scarce.

Diplomatic personnel became the target of terrorist threats in what the Guatemalan government stated was an effort to interfere with the transition of government. The threats to this mission and other individuals were independently confirmed.

Vice President-elect VILLAGRAN KRAMER protested the Minister of Government's expulsion of a Spanish Catholic nun for interfering in domestic politics. His efforts came to naught. The same official was renamed to the Minister of Government post in the LUCAS administration. An amnesty decree was approved in the closing days of Congress, but it appears unlikely that there are any political prisoners it will benefit. **END SUMMARY.**

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FORM 4-82 DS-323

Drawn by:	POL:RFKing	Contents and Classification Approved by:	ADCM:RLShuler
Cleances:	POL:AMIssacs	POL:VHBlocker	(draft)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR	
REVIEWED BY <i>Eaf</i>	DATE 7 OCT 1981
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END OF A REGIME. With only weeks to go to complete his term of office without having called a state of siege, then-President LAUGERUD faced increasing pressure to take strong action as violence mounted (Guatemala 3645). The end of May tragedy in Panzós (Guatemala A-68) was still making headlines as of mid-June when PGT terrorists bombed a military truck carrying Mobile Military Police (PMA). On June 19, Col. Samuel Humberto RAMIREZ Lima, Army G-1, was killed in what the government claimed was part of a conspiracy of the extreme right and left (Guatemala 3645). The EGP was ultimately and independently confirmed as the perpetrator of the Ramirez assassination.

Laugerud managed to calm things down only to witness another flare-up when a Guatemalan Catholic parish priest, Herógenes LOPEZ, was assassinated in nearby San José Pinula (Guatemala 3882). The killing of the military police angered the military establishment and created deep concern at the highest levels of the GOG. The priest's death inspired marches, public demonstrations against the government and the wealthy, and generally served, together with Panzós, as a take-off point which pressure organizations could tie to other grievances, real or politically expedient.

SOURCES OF VIOLENCE MOVE UNDERGROUND. The EGP execution of Calixto HERNANDEZ, manager of a farm in Escuintla Department, was another example of terrorist violence in June. Hernández had been threatened last November by the EGP. In announcing the execution, the EGP stated he had failed to heed their warning (77 Guatemala A-130).

The PGT (Communist Party) "Special Combat Unit" initially took credit for killing the PMAs. The Party's Central Committee denied PGT involvement or the existence of a "Special Combat Unit."

The Army G-1 killing is attributable to the EGP and was portrayed by the government as the opening step in a campaign of terror intended to disrupt the July 1

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inauguration. Although Father Lopez' killers are rumored to be known, they are variously alleged to be agents of land-owners or members of the GOG security apparatus. [REDACTED]

No suspects have been arrested.

(With respect to identifying sources of terror, President Laugerud recently expressed the view that for many years the guerrillas have been operating with stolen military uniforms.

OTHER VIOLENCE. The closing weeks of the Laugerud government were tense for the diplomatic community and the American Embassy in particular (Guatemala 3632 and 3704). [REDACTED]

Napoleón TORREZ, a campesino leader from Alta Verapaz reportedly arrested for involvement in the Panzós episode, was released for lack of evidence. Returning to his home with his wife, his taxi was stopped by unknown persons. He was taken away and his wife, who tried to prevent his seizure, was beaten. He has not been heard of since. The implication of government connivance has led to a number of protests.

A group of women from San Juan Cotzal (El Quiché Department) visited various news media to complain of the disappearance of relatives (husbands, brothers, etc.). They accused the Army of involvement in the disappearances, stating that in some cases their campesino relatives had fled from the constant harassment of the military. The press published a list of 28 campesinos, some of whom had been missing for several years.

The number of missing grew to 80 in the pages of the new daily, Nuevo Diario. [REDACTED]

According to that paper, the unidentified but knowledgeable sources attribute increasing troubles in the area to the establishment of a military unit nearby to fight guerrillas. They charge that the soldiers are burning houses and crops, and are pursuing the campesinos to kill them. The sources, generally

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campesino families, go nameless ostensibly for fear of reprisal. On the other hand, the paper carries the names of some of those its sources allege were responsible for terrorizing the campesinos. These include a "contractor" hired to hunt down campesinos for the Army, a comisionado militar, a soldier, and a lieutenant "who carries on his face the mark of the machete of the campesino whom he helped kill when the latter resisted capture." It was this episode which apparently prompted President Laugerud's remark (above) about stolen uniforms.

ATTITUDES AND ATMOSPHERICS

[REDACTED] the military (Minister of Defense SPIEGELER in particular) announced that the Church, especially its foreign missionaries, was stirring up the normally peaceful campesinos. Minister of Government ALVAREZ expelled a Spanish nun from Guatemala for alleged political meddling (Guatemala 3392). The charge against her apparently was not related to the Panzós incident, but the implication remained that she and her fellow missionaries were engaged in subversive activities and that her expulsion was to serve as a warning to others. According to GOG police and security services, several clergy have indeed been identified as involved in radical opposition groups, both in Guatemala and neighboring countries. The Catholic hierarchy as well as Protestant denominations very strongly denounced the Minister of Government's action. Vice President-elect Villagran Kramer also protested, but to no avail. (Ministers Spiegel and Alvarez are both holdovers in the new government.)

On June 29, Congress approved an amnesty decree to benefit those previously charged with political crimes or politically-motivated criminal acts. Persons who committed such crimes as murder, robbery or kidnapping cannot benefit from the amnesty decree even if these may have been politically motivated.

(Reports appear in the press from time to time about "guerrillas" being captured. Thereafter, no more is heard

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of the supposed guerrillas. A number of persons, for example, have been reported arrested in past months and turned over to courts in connection with the distribution of communist (PGT) propaganda. Occasionally the press notes that the courts have released an accused for lack of evidence. But mostly there is no further information unless some interested party directly approaches the media. Since there is little follow-up by the press, one might get the impression that the jails are overflowing. The likely situation is that the police arrest a person for a minor political offense and later release him without pursuing the matter in court.

[REDACTED] A liberal opposition Congressman told us recently that he doubted there were any political prisoners in Guatemala, as the term is generally understood.)

On another theme, President Laugerud's press office announced that the government would not support the proposal made in UNESCO for government-controlled international press agencies. It stated it favors the current system of free press. Vice President-elect Villagran Kramer was reported in the U.S. press as being pleased with President Carter's human rights remarks made at the OAS General Assembly (Guatemala 4230). Also at the OASGA, the Guatemalan delegation abstained on the proposal to invite Amnesty International as a "special invitee" (Guatemala 3290).

A new daily newspaper, Nuevo Diario, began publishing in June. Its editor, Mario SOLORZANO Foppa, is making use of his leftist connections to make the newspaper sound somewhat radical and controversial. The result so far has been that leftist elements use it to attack one another -- for instance, the Marxist university students association (AEU) vs. the radical National Committee for Labor Unity (CNUS). In addition, it publishes continuing attacks against the government and military establishment. Whether it will play a significant role in human rights (if it survives) remains to be demonstrated, but it has editorially applauded our human rights policy.

STATISTICS. Of the 25 deaths (apart from the 19 PMAs), 10 were in the Pacific lowlands, 7 in the Indian highlands, 3 in Guatemala City, 2 in the Petén, 2 in Izabal, and one in the Oriente. Besides the six PMAs, three other persons were wounded.

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